

HENDERSON BROTHERS

By Ralph Lea and Janice Roth

The town of Mokelumne Station (later renamed Lodi) was one year old and beginning to draw merchants. It was August in 1870 when John T. Collins bought a lot on Sacramento Street. Collins opened his store on the third lot north of Pine Street and

began to sell stoves and tin ware. The San Joaquin directory of 1871 also listed Collins as a tinsmith in Woodbridge. In 1873, Collins filed a petition declaring bankruptcy. By 1878, Collins sold merchandise and again provided tin smithing for the

area. The fire on October 11, 1887, devastated much of the business area in town including Collins' store. He lost the building and \$4,900 in merchandise. He was insured for only \$1000.

Collins cleared the ashes and



▲ Henderson Brothers on North Sacramento Street, 1898. (l to r): Gus Gerlach, Fred Morrell, and Bill Spooner.



▲ Henderson Brothers, before 1909. (1 to r): Luther Brown, Mrs. Allen P. Wakefield, W.W. Henderson and W.A. Spooner.

Photo repair by Cletus Roth.

rebuilt his store out of fireproof brick and was back in the hardware business. His new store, a 2 story build-

ing with living quarters on the second floor, was located at 9 North Sacramento Street just across Pine

Street from the old Lodi Hotel. Another fire in 1896 prompted Collins to sell the business to Tom and Woods Henderson that same year.

Brothers Samuel T. "Thomas" and William "Woods" Henderson, officially began business as Henderson Bros. Hardware Company on August 6, 1896. They expanded the general hardware business to include plumbing and heating services and windmill installation. The brothers hired employees that became active in the Lodi community. Gustave A. Gerlach began his employment with Henderson's in their first year. They hired William A. Spooner as a clerk in 1901. Spooner became a Trustee and later the Mayor of Lodi.



▲ Fourth of July Parade in 1912, corner of Sacramento and Oak Streets, featuring the Stiletto Display of Henderson Brothers Company. Note the Hotel on left, and the Madison Building on the right.

Telephone service came to Lodi about the same time that the Henderson Brothers purchased their business. Graham's Drugstore had the very first and only phone in Lodi followed shortly by Henderson's and then Dr. J.M. Blodgett, a dentist. The telephone, being a novelty, added to the people coming into the store. It was not until about a year later that the first regular exchange and central switchboard were established relieving the three businesses of telephone users dropping in to tryout the telephone.

Woods Henderson took time from the business to serve on the board of the newly established (April 9, 1901) Lodi Chamber of Commerce and was one of the five businessmen to serve on the Tokay Carnival Committee in 1907. The Henderson Bros. Company incorporated on January 31, 1906. Officers named were W. W. Henderson, president; S. T. Henderson, vice president; G. A. Gerlach, treasurer; W. A. Spooner, secretary and T. H. Myers. Gerlach was in charge of the shop, Spooner was head salesman and Myers was head of the paint and wallpaper department. Later that year Edwin G. Steacy, a traveling salesman with the W. P. Fuller Paint Company, joined the staff at Henderson Bros. Edwin Steacy was the son of Wellington Steacy who had moved his family and carriage, wagon and blacksmith shop from Lockeford to Lodi in 1883.

Steacy belonged to the Mokelumne Club, an exclusive men's club started in 1907, whose membership consisted of the men who held the Tokay Grape Carnival. The club was going to have a costume party and Mr. Steacy didn't know what to wear. Someone told him to wear a smile and no one would recognize him.

It was in 1909, a drive was held to have the shops close at 6 p.m. on weekdays. Clerks came to work by 7 a.m. and the business owners agreed that they should not be expected to work over 11 hours a day.

Tom and Woods Henderson decided to get out of the hardware business in 1909. They sold their stock to Spooner who became the corporation president. Other board members were: E. G. Steacy, Secretary; John Boyce, treasurer; Gerlach and Myers rounded out the board. The business kept the Henderson Bros. name, but the Henderson brothers became vineyardists.

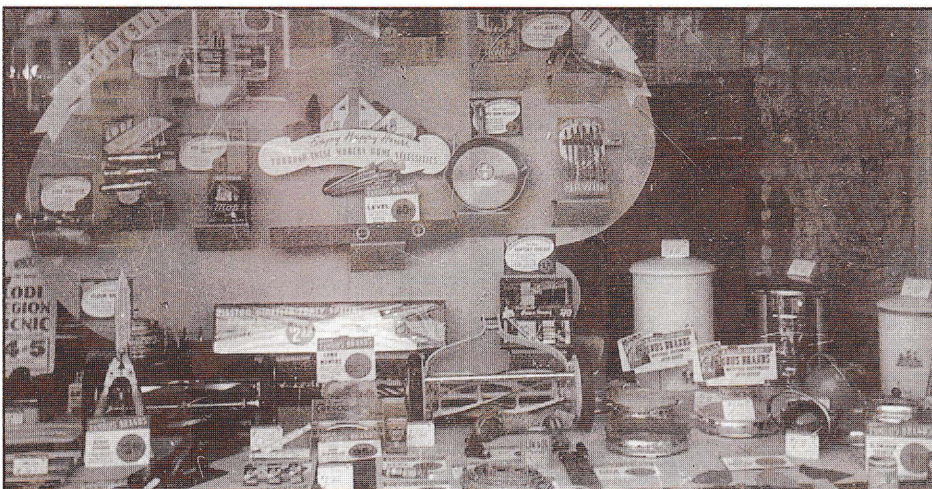
By 1910, Henderson Bros. had five plumbers and one tinner on staff. Each man had his own horse and wagon that were boarded at the livery stable. This was a prosperous time and Lodi was booming. In 1913-14, Henderson Bros. did the plumbing for the Hotel Lodi at the



Sept. 16, 1940; 9 North Sacramento Street was the home of Henderson Bros. Co., Inc. There had been a hardware store at this location since 1888. ▲



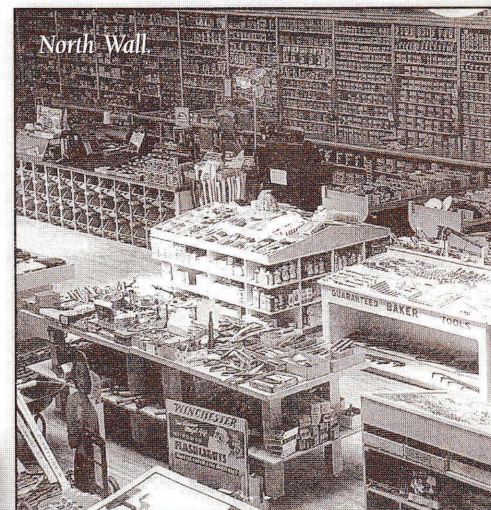
July 1, 1919; Henderson Brothers eventually moved into the Beckman, Welch, & Thompson Building after remodeling, located on Sacramento Street. ▲



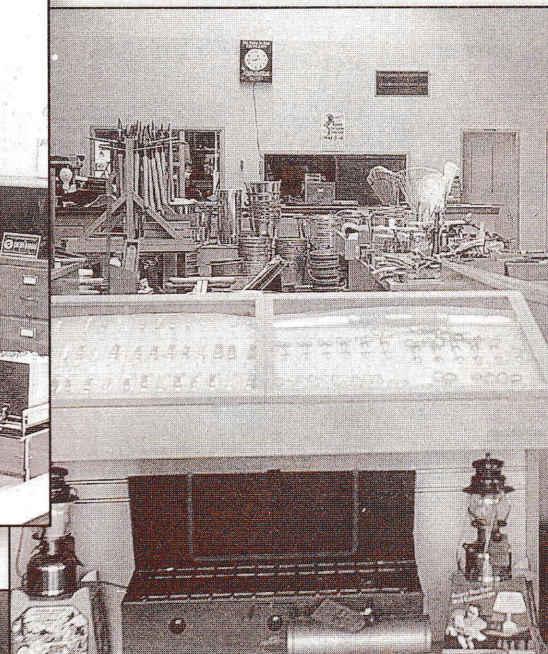
April, 1940; The Henderson Hardware store window display during National Hardware Week. ▲ This is in the old store on North Sacramento Street.

HENDERSON BROS

A snapshot in time; all photos

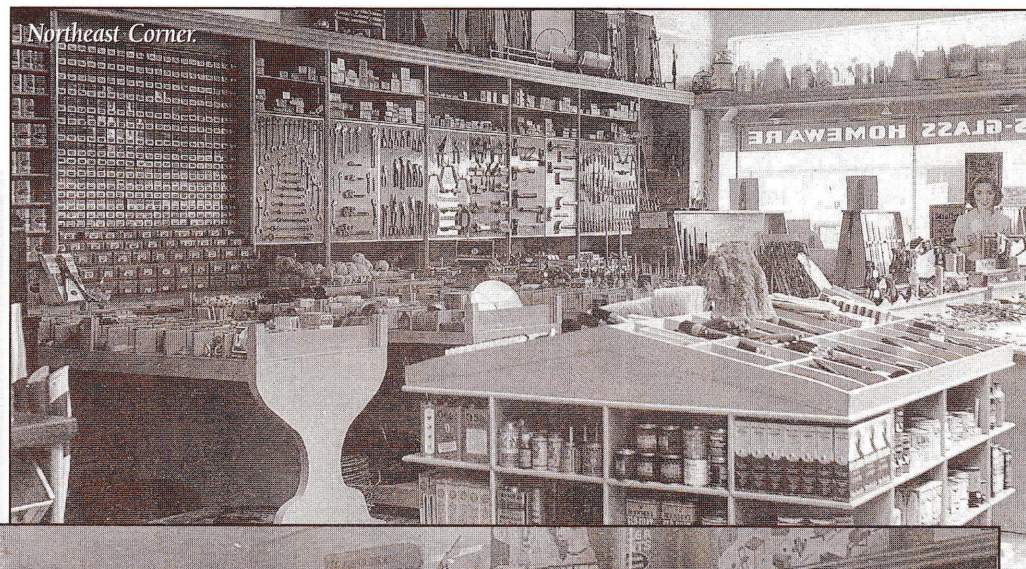
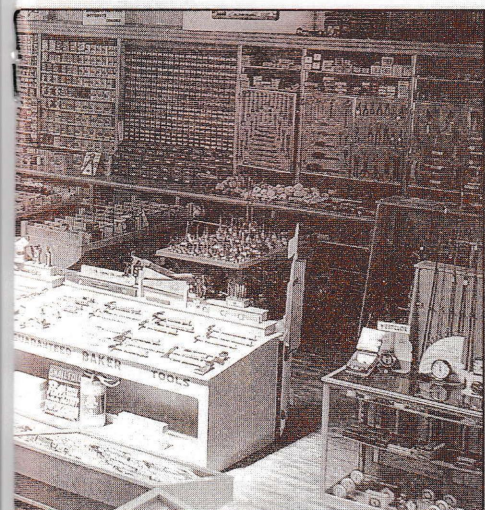


▲ View of the office; l to r: Mildred Butts, E. G. Steacy and Alleen Gable.

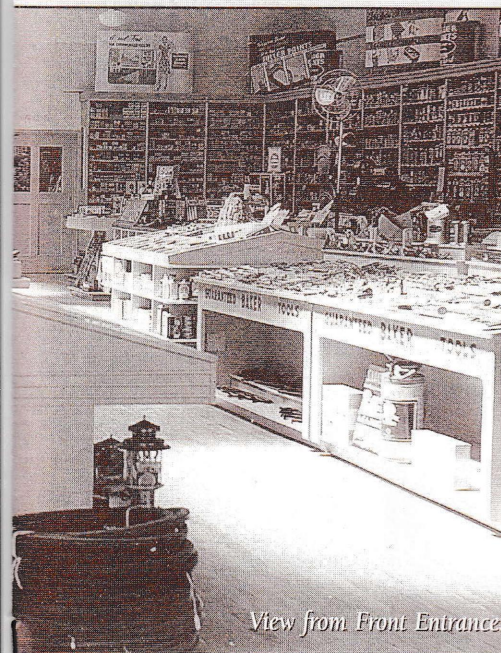


HERS HARDWARE

Photos taken on April 1, 1941.



Gus Grube at cash register, east wall of store. ▲



View from Front Entrance.



Southeast Corner.

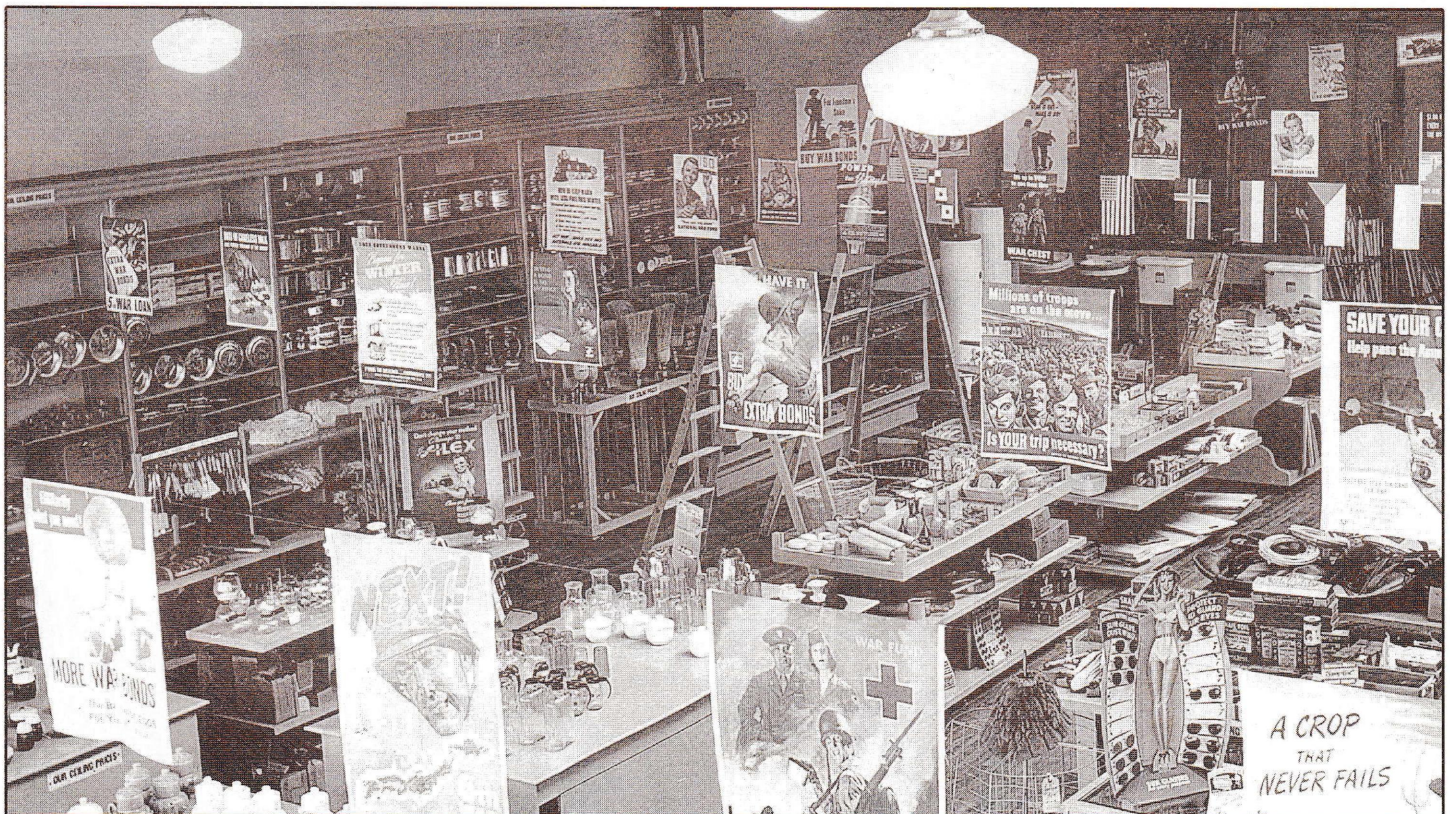


▲ Henderson Brothers Hardware proudly displaying posters sent out by the government to help sell bonds during World War II.

southwest corner of Pine and School Streets. The job required two carloads of materials that were stacked on the

street for lack of storage space. Plumbers of the day earned about 75 cent an hour. Other buildings in Lodi

that were plumbed and heated by Henderson Brothers are the City Hall and the Carnegie Library (now



▲ Photo taken during World War II; notice the empty shelves due to rationed goods.

Carnegie Forum) both on Pine Street.

In 1918, Mildred (Botts) Robins started work at Henderson Bros. and was the bookkeeper until 1962. In 1919, Edwin Steacy became president of Henderson Brothers Hardware, a position held until he retired in 1950.

Henderson Brothers evolved with the time and around 1925 Henderson Brothers replaced many steam heat systems with newer floor furnaces in the Lodi area. Fraser furnaces were quickly installed by cutting a hole in the floor, dropping in the furnace and connecting it to the gas line.

In 1927, William A. Spooner became Lodi's Mayor and sold his interest in the business. Later, he opened Lodi's first Frigidaire Store selling the first electric refrigerator. His store was a big success.

In 1928, James Gibbons bought into the company and stayed until 1972. It was in 1940's, that the company sent Gibbons to a large hardware convention in San Francisco. Gibbons had other plans, but the company officers insisted that he go. When he arrived at the show he was handed a ticket for a door prize that turned out to be the winning ticket. Jim won a brand new Ford automobile. He was so happy that when he returned to Lodi he went around showing off the car. On Monday morning, when arriving at work, the boss asked him to turn over the keys to the car, stating that he was working for the company when he won the car so the car belonged to the company. After that he would tell the story to anyone who would listen. Gibbons retired in 1972.

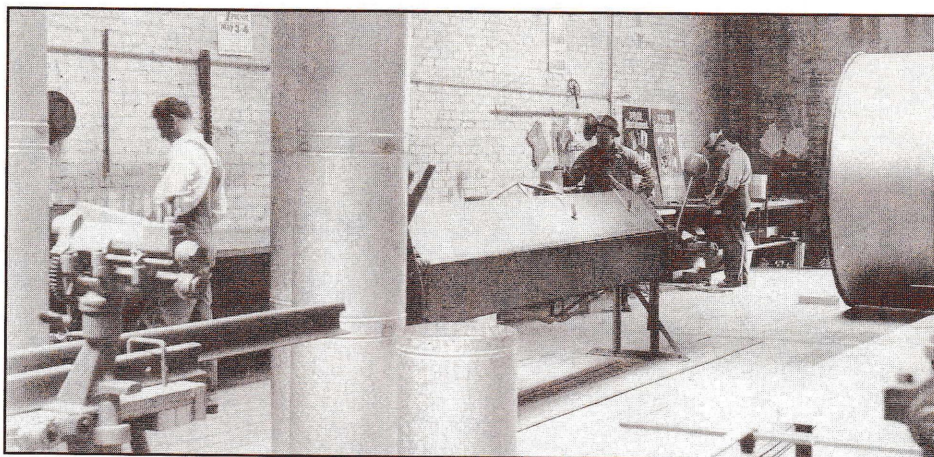
Some of the other names connected to Henderson Brothers were Art Goodwin, Sam Peightal and Christine Jones.

The Great Depression years of the 1930's slowed sales at the store, but Henderson Bros. was a life saver to many families operating farms by affording credit to them as long as they agreed to buy from them when

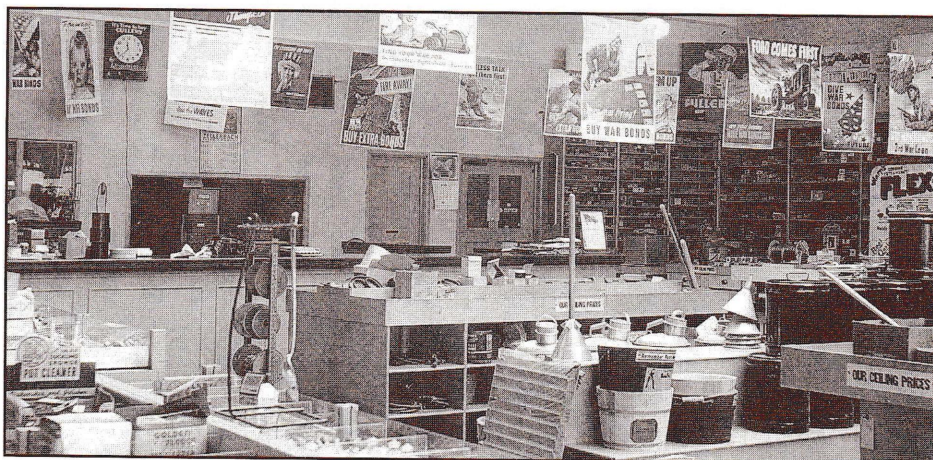
they had the cash. Business grew and by September of 1940, Henderson Brothers moved from the original Collins store location a 9 N. Sacramento St. to 21 S. Sacramento Street. This was the Beckman, Welch & Thompson general merchandise store building owned by Jack Graffigna. The second story of the building was removed and a new

store front was built. Henderson's also acquired the old Black's Garage at 217 S. Sacramento Street for their sheet metal, heating and air conditioning operations.

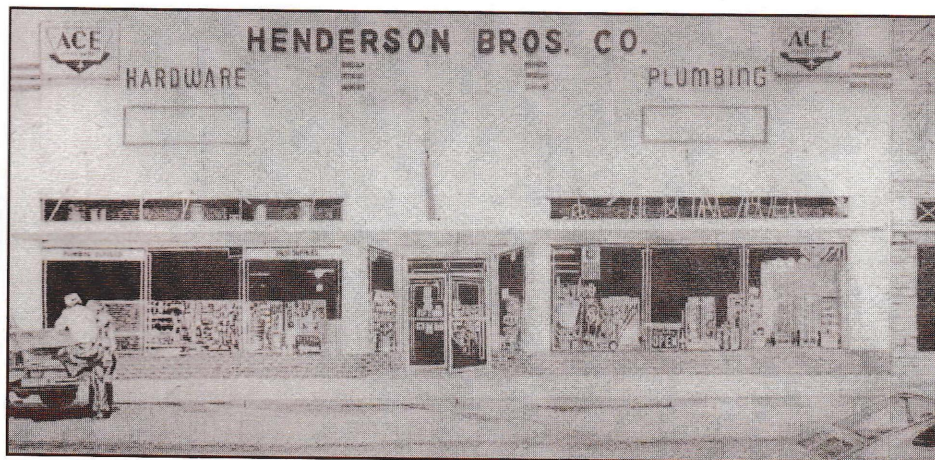
Hugh Steacy, son of Edwin Steacy, began working at Henderson Bros. in 1949. He had worked as a purchasing agent for Shewan-Jones Winery after graduating from Stanford University



Sheet metal shop (l to r): Herb Lehr, Gus Hust, and Vic Myers. ▲



A noticeable lack of stock on the shelves of Henderson Hardware during World War II. ▲



A pencil rendition of Henderson Brothers Company, Inc. store front in early 1980s by Mary Beth Preszler. ▲

in 1933. In 1950, Edwin retired and Hugh Steacy became head of the company.

It was in the early 1950's that plumbing, heating and air-conditioning became the big money makers for the company. Henderson's sent their crew to school to learn the latest techniques for installation of heating and air-conditioning. Restaurants and businesses were the first to be air-conditioned. Within a few years the price became more affordable and was available for private homes.

In 1954, Elmer Berg and Janie Miller Holloway began to work for the

company. Holloway was the 1946 Grape Festival Queen and became the company's Secretary/Treasurer.

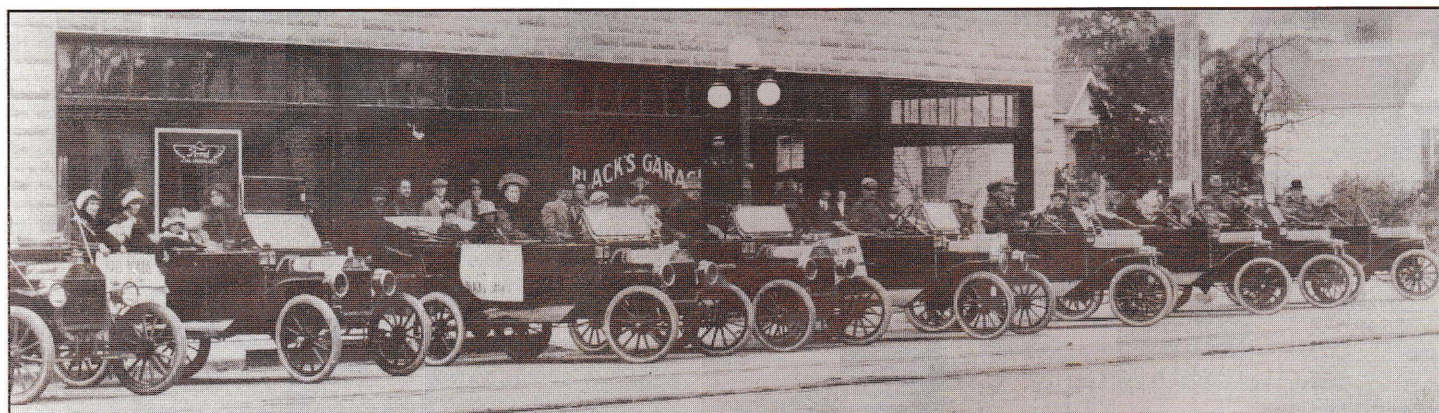
Ken McConnell, Hugh Steacy's son-in-law, joined Henderson Bros. and became part owner in 1961. Michael Fyffe began working for the company as a teenager in 1973, and joined the business in 1981 as part owner.

In October 2000, 104 years after it began as Henderson Bros. Hardware Co., Fyffe announced his purchase of the store. In selling their interest in the store, Steacy and McConnell planned to continue to do

HVAC and sheet metal business at 217 S. Sacramento St. as Henderson Brothers.

Fyffe changed the name of the store to Downtown Hardware. Within six months Fyffe was forced to close the old-fashioned hardware store. The historic hardware store's entire stock was sold in a one-day auction held on April 21, 2001.

Henderson Bros. Co., Inc. is still going strong in the heating, air conditioning and plumbing business and proudly advertises their business as serving Lodi since 1896.



Blacks Garage, featuring new Fords in 1913, is the current home of Henderson Brothers, 217 South Sacramento Street, Lodi. ▲

References

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▲ "Henderson's Still a Hardware Store" was the article in the Lodi Times, Friday, December 21, 1951. Shown above, l to r: "Babe" Gibbons, "Hap" Myers, Vic Myers, Ed Moore, "Tottie" Steacy, Jim Gibbons, Ed Steacy, and Mrs. Moore. The photo was taken in 1942 immediately following the opening of the new store on South Sacramento Street, Lodi.